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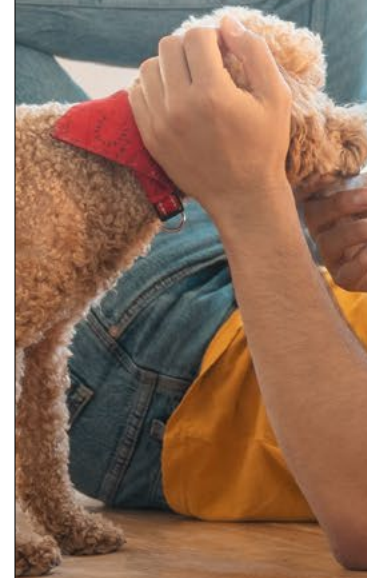


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COVID-19 threw us into confusing times. For an LGBTQ media that a part of it includes print component, meant that printers are closed, distribution spots are closed as businesses went into lockdown, and as with most businesses sales were down (it is no secret that most LGBTQ media relies on advertising sales to deliver free media to our community.)

So we had to very quickly find ways to stay in operation to deliver the content our community is looking for to keep informed and entertained during these times.

On the business side of things, we had to cut corners as many businesses did, make sacrifices, cancel events, conduct meetings remotely, and work many free hours to keep serving our community and clients. With business down, instead of just sitting at our offices feeling sad, we decided to launch a number of new initiatives to help others who are struggling (like The Pink Basket Project, for instance... www.thepinkbasket.ca)

On the content front move things, and rather fast, to digital delivery and onto other platforms like video, to get really great productions to our LGBTQ community to enjoy. We were lucky enough though as we did have a strong online and social media presence, and we have the experience to use these platforms.

One of the ideas we had was to put together this collection of advice and pondering on COVID-19 as a special edition of PinkPlayMags, just to give you more things to read (we have lots of time for reading and watching these) and to give struggling businesses another chance for free exposure.

We were lucky, and we feel blessed, we know many have had much more to deal with, some lost loved ones, and many are still concerned about their businesses and livelihood (not that we are out of the danger zone, media is not easy, more so an LGBTQ media, even on a good day). We are however confident in our resilience as a community and as people, and we will make it out of this, we know we will, maybe with changes, maybe to a different world, but it will all be okay.

Antoine Elhashem
Publisher





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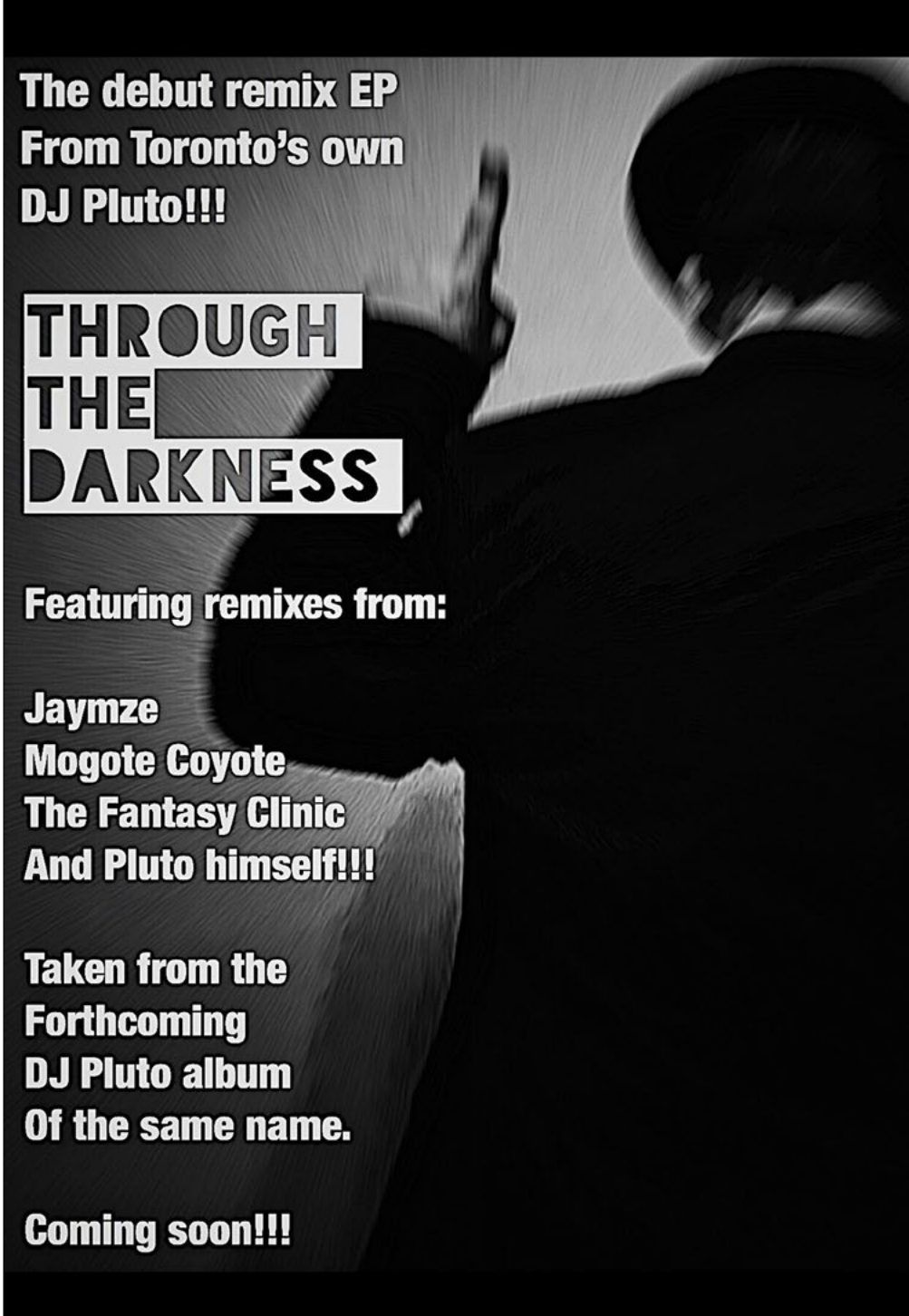
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The Science and Art of Not Suffering in a Global Pandemic

By Todd Kaufman

“I am doing just fine. It’s like I have been practising for this all my life,” said one of my clients who had spent the first two-thirds of her life stressed, battling panic attacks and a whole truckload of anxiety.

It was early in the pandemic and we were all being warned to lock down and stay inside to prevent the spread of a global virus that had already killed tens of thousands. Here was Lola*, one of my longer-term anxiety treatment clients, telling me she was fine, even chill! Lola had been doing well for some time as we had found a way to end her panic attacks and teach her how to convert all that energy behind her anxiety into her superpower. But I confess, as well as she had been doing, I did not expect this response.

“Not like I relish the fact or anything,” she continued, “but watching everyone else finally see the world as scary as I have, well, it’s a bit comforting to know I’m not alone. Besides which, I’ve got great tools to keep me being this new me, so not a lot of reason to choose to suffer when I don’t have to.”

And there it was, Lola was casually espousing an ancient Buddhist bit of wisdom: Life is suffering. It is up to us whether we want to suffer in response.

Survival Skills during COVID-19

Thought Management Skills

In a crisis it takes more than physical skills to survive. We also need to care for our mental health. Mental health can be negatively impacted when under physical duress. Incidents of partner abuse, depression, anxiety, suicide, and even infanticide are on the rise. We all have different skills and capacities that help us negotiate change. If we fail, the outcome for ourselves and others can be just as deadly as the virus itself.

Here’s the kicker – we are not taught about how to think as we grow up and more specifically, we are not taught how to manage our thoughts. When thoughts arise that are scary or worrisome, and we allow them to remain, we begin to ruminate and get stuck in negative thought loops. This can lead to high levels of anxiety and depression.

Like any skill, thought management can be learned. Neuroplasticity, the science of how our brain changes, has taught us there are three key elements to rewire our brain. Whether it is learning a new dance move, or how to manage your thoughts, these elements are: Intention, Repetition and Reward.

For centuries, the Buddhists have practised various forms of meditation, which can loosely

be defined as thought management. The Dalai Lama, a physicist, started The Mindfulness Institute in Chicago to explore the intersection between science (primarily neurology, the study of the brain) and mindfulness. The discoveries have been remarkable and have taught us a great deal about how to change our brain, by learning how to manage our thoughts.

There are hundreds of different types of meditation, all with differing goals. A ‘Focal Point Meditation,’ which you can learn about at www.TheAnxietyClinic.com blogs, is specifically designed to teach you how to notice a thought when it first arises, and discard or change that thought quickly before it becomes embedded and turns into worry or anxiety.

Just because you have a thought does not mean you have to keep it! Thoughts that bring you to worry, anxiety, or are otherwise triggering of negative feelings can be vanquished, given the skills.

The author of one of my favourite quotes is debatable, but this quotation sums up much of why we suffer, and how unnecessary suffering is:

“I have suffered many painful events in my life, most of which never happened.”

Connection and Community

Connection and community are directly related to not just our physical survival, but to our mental health success. In 2011, the United Nations declared solitary confinement a form of torture. Extended isolation and separation from others (family, friends and associates) can dramatically impact how we think and feel. Thoughts of loneliness and despair can impact our sense of self-worth, which in turn impact how we behave in the world.

Humans are designed to do best when connected, and isolation is contrary to the very thing that makes us a successful species.

We must connect to thrive, yet here we are being told to do just the opposite to prevent the spread of the virus — we have been asked to isolate and quarantine.

Intention, Repetition and Reward. Now more than ever we must be intentional about maintaining regular, rewarding connections with those in our lives who bring us joy and love. We must find a way to uphold, uplift and create these connections while still respecting the necessary physical impositions of isolation.

Ironically, technology, the very thing that has driven us away from in-person gatherings at bars and social clubs, may now be a good option to stay connected. Consider making a life rule to replace texting and voice calls with FaceTime, Skype or other platforms with video calling features. Be a leader among your friends and family insisting to see them face to face when you talk. Make a commitment to intentionally reach out to someone (or two) daily with whom you have not spoken in a while. Don’t take no for an answer when people begin to retreat from relationships. Be the voice and face of connection!

We are creating a new normal. As Lola taught us: “There is not a lot of reason to suffer when we don’t have to.”

Our life experiences either become a life sentence or a life lesson. Be intentional about how you think and how you stay connected. You have every right, even in a pandemic, to be doing life, and not let life be doing you!

**Lola is a fictional character whose experience reflects the real-life musings of some of my clients..*

Todd Kaufman is a Registered Psychotherapist and Coach specializing in anxiety disorders. You can reach Todd or book an appointment online at www.TheAnxietyClinic.com 1-800-699-3396.



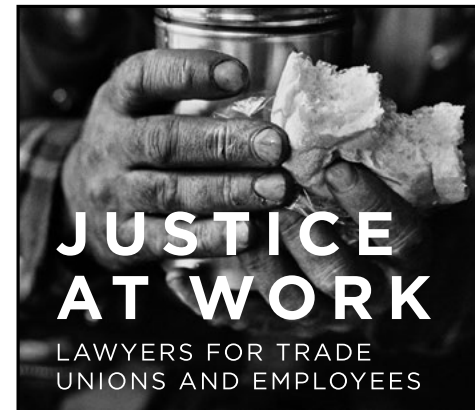
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Alarm Rings at 7am and I wake up with the taste of gin still on my breath from last night's drinking along festival.

I look around the room and all I see is wigs, bras and pantyhose spread upon the floor like the wicked witch just melted from the Wizard of Oz.

I walk downstairs and open my fridge and smell some rotten onions but then realize that's my breath blowing back in my face. In the back of the fridge I see some leftover poutine from the night before. Of course, being The Poutine Queen of Canada, I reheat it in the microwave and add more gravy 'cause thats how I roll.

7:15 am Once my Belly is full I break open a bottle of Freixenet "champagne" and have my daily mimosas 'cause that's what a Real Queen does in quarantine. "It's always Sunday Funday in my house, Sugar Tits!"

I sit back and think about how we're all stir crazy to see each other but I understand we have to do this to get back to a "normal" life

and be able to see you all again at Woody's Toronto.

7:45 am I find myself after two bottles of champagne scrubbing the floor screaming like Joan Crawford, "Christina clean this mess!" but then realize I'm just screaming at my sister who's name just happens to be Kristina. I then start sweeping and mopping the floors dressed as Little Orphan Annie singing, "It's a Hard Knock Life," but I know I'm not the only one out there, trust me... I've seen your TikToks too. (Miss Conception's TikTok is @miss_conception_)

Good gosh! Now it's **8 am** and I'm exhausted already. I sit down at my computer after being a little tipsy and start watching my favourite quarantine show... XTUBE! There are so many fascinating creatures and huuuuuuge egos, I can't even keep up! LOL

8:01 am and its nap time...

zzzzzz... 8 hours later...

4:01 pm ...My nap is over and I'm ready to finish my daily quarantine routine.



4:02pm I walk down the stairs and put my shoes on to go to the No Frills to grab some food 'cause there's no more leftovers in the fridge.

I stand in line with my homemade sequin mask as everyone stares 'cause I'm sparkling like The Goddess of the World. I grab my grapefruit Perrier and Smart One Meals (Weight Watchers) 'cause I've lost 20 pounds so far. I told myself "GIRL! You're not coming out of this quarantine wider then you already are!"

4:30 pm I'm back home breaking open a box of white wine 'cause I'm classy that way. Time for some news and some trash television "Jerry! Jerry! Jerry!"

5:30 pm and 4 litres of boxed wine later I'm completely pissed, belting out a bunch of notes for a bunch of boozy old fairies in the alleyway beside my building. Oh wait... that's just my drunken old has-been neighbour Lena Leftovers (Lena Over) begging for change in the lane way. "Hey Girl! Hey!"



6pm It's time for bed 'cause it's been a long and tiresome day.

All in all, I know we will make it through this together and you'll be able to see myself and others back on stage. 'Till then I'll be driving my mobile home around Ontario doing curb side shows (Socially Distanced, of course!) to a Town Near You. Check it out www.draggingacrosscanada.ca

Love, Miss Conception
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Drag photos by David Hawe

Kevin Levesque drag creating Miss Conception is one of the most loved entertainers locally and abroad, you can check her our and get in touch via www.missconception.ca or <https://www.facebook.com/missctoronto/>



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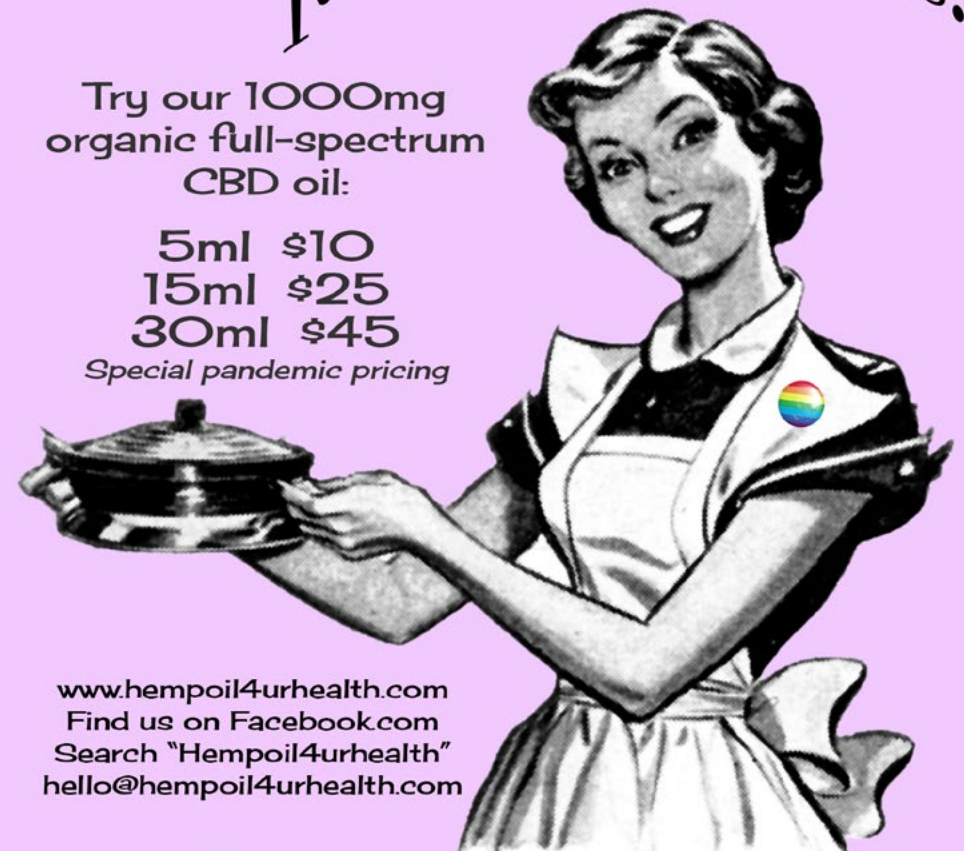
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HIV, Hooking-up and COVID-19

By Kero Saleib

Living with HIV during that time of COVID-19 for men who have sex with men has proven particularly challenging emotionally, mentally, and physically. Are people living with HIV/AIDS more at risk?

The answer is not simple, but if the individual is adhering to their meds, they are at low risk. However, if they do have other ailments that compromise the lungs or immune system, then you would be considered at high risk, but not due to HIV/AIDS.

Be aware of any information going around stating that there are HIV meds that are being considered as a cure for COVID-19. THAT IS FALSE! There is no current science to back this up. The same thing goes for PrEP; it is not a cure and it will not protect anyone from getting COVID-19.

Most recently, COVID-19 has been found in semen and feces. The CDC is trying to determine if COVID-19 can be sexually transmitted. No one knows yet, but as a precaution, we recommend that you get a COVID-19 test. The province has now extended testing to asymptomatic people.

Hooking up:

Are people really going to stop from hooking up during the pandemic? Here are some rules

that a person who feels the need to hook up should follow:

- Find one person that you will hook up with during this time. Know for sure that neither of you are hooking up with ANYONE else.
- Set agreements with each other:
 - Undress at the door and put clothes in a plastic bag.
 - Jump into the shower first.
 - Make sure all surfaces are sanitized ahead of time.
 - Provide hand sanitizer at the entrance.
 - Have an open conversation about your whereabouts.
 - Encourage and reaffirm with each other that there is no one else
 - Wear masks and gloves on your way and when leaving the person's place.

Grief and loss:

Currently we are bombarded by the media about people who are dying from the virus. However, we are also seeing an increase in domestic violence, suicide, heart attacks, increased substance use and depression. The pandemic is more traumatic than anyone anticipated. Some have experienced a variety of losses in their lives during this time. Some of the losses are those of a loved one, but also of a career or a home, loss of freedom, loss of community, loss of gatherings.... the list goes

on. The first thing to do is be aware of your losses. I recommend that you write them down, so you have a visual understanding of these losses. It allows you to put a name to the losses and it will be of help when going through the five stages of grief.

The 5 stages of Grief are:

- Denial: "I don't believe this even happened; I won't believe it till I see it."
- Anger: "Why me!? Why now?! That's not fair!!!"
- Bargaining: "Please Universe, I will never have another drink again, if you just let me get my job back."
- Depression: Feeling of extreme sadness and concern that you might not come out of it.
- Acceptance: Finally accepting the situation and understanding that it just is and it's all going to be OK.

Remember that when you are going through these stages, you will not be going through them in this exact order. The process can take anywhere from a few hours to years, all depending on the severity of the loss and how you are allowing yourself to grieve. You might experience these stages all at once in a single day, and on other days you might go back and forth between them over a long period of time. Be patient with yourself.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness helps you to be aware and live more in the present, so you can deal better with what is to come in the future. What you must remember is that mindfulness does not actually require you to take time and always sit in a lotus position. There are several ways of practicing mindfulness.

Meditative mindfulness: Sit with your feet flat on the floor and your hands resting on your lap. Start with a minimum 5 minute session and focus on your breathing. Add one minute a day. Breath in for 4 seconds, hold for

2, exhale for 4 and hold again for 2 seconds.

Daily routine meditation: When taking a shower, feel the water on your body, the smell of the soap and imagine that the water going down the drain is your stresses and anxieties. You can do that while washing dishes, eating and cooking. Feel, smell, taste, imagine.

Zoothrapy: Caring for an animal or having access to a pet can be helpful. Animals always live in the present. They remind you to live in the now as you tend to their needs.

Ecotherapy: Whether you take care of plants at home, or enjoy the trees and grass while taking a walk, or even just birdwatching in their natural habitats, ecotherapy reminds you that you are connected to everything around you that is natural. We are made of the same stuff as the cosmos.

Creative mindfulness: Explore your artistic side. Remember you do not have to be good at it to enjoy creativity. It is a tool that you use to express your feelings and thoughts. It can be done through painting, creative writing, dancing, singing, or other creative means.

The possibilities for mindfulness practice are endless and they do not have to be complicated.

Please look after yourselves and each other. Take precautions. Remember that the advice provided in this article is just that... advice. It is up to each of us to look after ourselves and each other.

Kero Saleib is the Men who have sex with men (MSM) Outreach Coordinator at the AIDS Committee of Durham Region. He is also the founder and producer of Middle Eastern Nights, an LGBTQ+ bi-monthly event.





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All about CBD

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By Boyd Kodak

CBD is the latest buzzword in the health industry. Is it really all it's made out to be? Can it really help improve my health? Will it reduce my anxiety? Can it truly strengthen my immune system and help protect me?

The answer to all is a resounding yes, but all CBD products are not created equal.

It's important to know everything about the CBD you are using, and all of the ingredients used in the product. Even packaging is important, there should be no plastic containers used, only a dark lead free glass. It's really important that all ingredients that are used in the product, including the CBD, are organic.

There are certain parts of the body where our skin is thinner, and more absorbent than others. CBD is best absorbed under the tongue, and should be held there for as long as possible. Once swallowed, our gastrointestinal acids reduce the effectiveness of the dose. It could be as little as 5% of its original strength.

The other products found in CBD oil are also

extremely important. Some manufacturers use things like grape seed oil, as they are inexpensive. They aren't necessarily good for you, and sometimes even harmful. Look for a product with quality oils that help aid absorption.

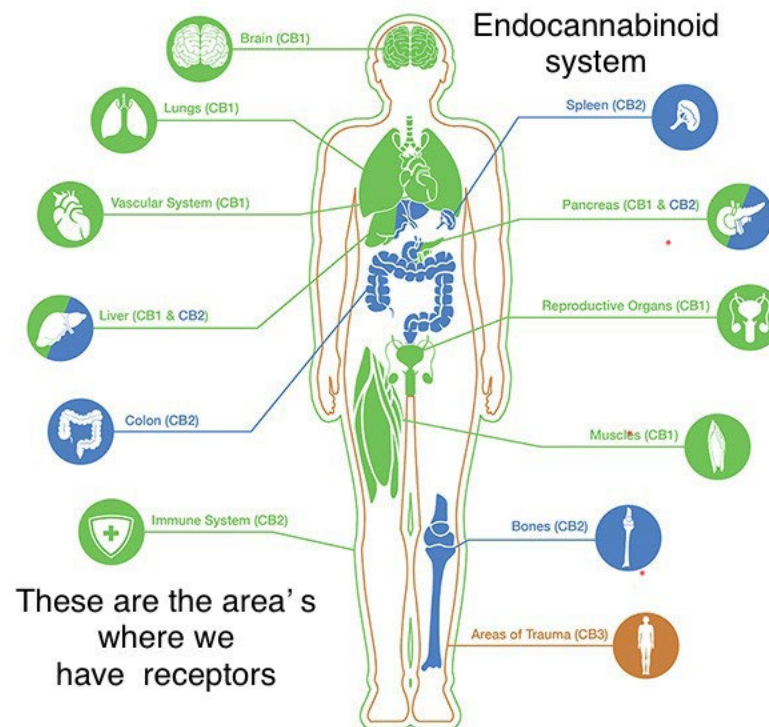
We all have natural cannabinoid systems throughout our bodies, which have CB1, CB2 and CB3 receptors. A CBD supplement will provide strength wherever it is needed. It's been shown to help with a variety of ailments: pain, inflammation, anxiety, nervous system disorders, depression, seizures, immune strengthening, sleep difficulties, and anti-aging, among other benefits. Some of the most recent studies, include hopeful findings in the treatment of Covid-19.

CBD can come from cannabis or hemp. They are relatively the same, but the hemp plant has less than 3% THC.

There are full-spectrum oils that contain various other cannabinoids such as CBDA, CBG, THC, CBN, and CBC, in addition to CBD.

There are partial-spectrum oils, these are oils that contain some other cannabinoids in addition to CBD. There are oils made with CBD isolate, which is an extract that is 99% CBD.

Even within the categories mentioned above, all CBD suppliers will have different test results. Some have little amounts of these



other cannabinoids, compared to others. Your CBD supplier should be willing to share those numbers with you.

Many feel that the full spectrum oil is really the best for you, and while it is not psychoactive, it does produce an entourage effect, often compared to the good feeling one gets after running or a good exercise workout.

While products out there available in strengths of 300mg per 30ml, and 500mg per 30ml, are fine for a pet, they aren't strong enough to really help a human. I would recommend 1,000mg per 30 ml. as a good starting and maintenance dose. Depending on illness being treated, degree of strength may require adjusting.

Everyone absorbs CBD differently, so some trial & error may be required to find your required dose. It's important to take it consistently, even if you don't notice a big difference at first. I can't tell you how many

people tell me they don't notice the difference, until they run out, and their problems return.

CBD has now been used in its first Big Pharma product, an epilepsy's medication for children. The medical benefits of CBD and other cannabinoids are growing on a regular basis, and holds tremendous promise for a positive future.

The information provided in article is for educational and informational purposes only. The author makes no warranty regarding the application of this information to any individual's health issues.

Boyd Kodak is a Toronto-based artist & activist. Combating a Lupus disorder since early childhood, Boyd pursued his own research, and opted instead to pursue his own successful course of treatment using CBD oil.





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LGBTQ+ community are expected to lead the path to recovery in Travel and Tourism

By Bryen Dunn

The community overall is also somewhat more resilient when it comes to adversity, and the ability to bounce back from challenging situations.

It's also not the first time in recent memory that this demographic has been struck by a pandemic of sorts. We only have to look back to the 1980s AIDS crisis to see how individuals took control, demanded action, and fought for their rights to equality. It comes as no surprise that as the world begins its recovery from COVID-19, this community is once again perceived to lead the way.

A recent survey of the LGBTQ+ community was done by the *International LGBTQ+ Travel Association* (IGLTA) to gauge their attitudes toward leisure travel in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results found that once global timelines and safety protocols are established, there is a strong desire within this segment of the population to resume travel in 2020.

Responses came from approximately 15,000 LGBTQ+ travellers around the world, with the largest representation from the United States, Canada, Brazil, France and Mexico.

- Two-thirds (66%) of global respondents

said they would feel comfortable travelling again for non-essential/non-business reasons before the end of 2020.

- Nearly half (46%) said they will not change the types of destinations they choose to visit after the COVID-19 situation is resolved, reflecting a high degree of destination loyalty amid the uncertainty.

The survey also focused on the likelihood of LGBTQ+ individuals choosing a variety of travel-related activities in the next six months, again showcasing strong interest from this segment:

- 48% are likely/very likely to stay in a hotel or resort
- 57% are likely/very likely to take a domestic leisure trip
- 34% are likely/very likely to stay in a vacation home, condo or rental apartment
- 29% are likely/very likely to take an international leisure trip
- 45% are likely/very likely to take a short-haul flight (3 hours or less)
- 35% are likely/very likely to take a medium-haul flight (3-6 hours)
- 27% are likely/very likely to take a long-haul flight (6 hours or more)

The responses came from 14,658 individuals around the world who identify as LGBTQ+

- 77% of respondents identified as gay; 6% lesbian; 12% bisexual
- 79% of respondents are between the ages of 25 and 64
- 88% of respondents are men; 8% are women and 2% are transgender

In many ways, LGBTQ+ adults appear to mirror their heterosexual counterparts in being somewhat concerned, yet depart in key ways, including their past frequency of travel. LGBTQ+ adults reported taking an average of 3.6 leisure trips in the past year, compared to 2.3 leisure trips for non-LGBTQ+ adults. As well, LGBTQ+ adults took 2.1 business trips on average, compared to 1.2 trips by non-LGBTQ+ adults.

Other key differences also surfaced in this study:

- Asked when they anticipate their next leisure trip, 28% of LGBTQ+ adults responded it would take place in the next four months (May-August) when contrasted with 21% of non-LGBTQ+ adults. Just over half (51%) of LGBTQ+ adults vs. 46% of non-LGBTQ+ adults expect to travel for vacation in 2020.
- 46% of LGBTQ+ adults, when compared with 37% of non-LGBTQ+ counterparts, expect the pandemic situation will be resolved before this year's peak summer travel season.

Whether travelling or not in the near-term, LGBTQ+ respondents reported feeling more comfortable than others making these specific travel choices today:

- Travelling to a US destination: 64% LGBTQ+ vs. 58% non-LGBTQ+ adults.
- Staying in a hotel: 59% LGBTQ+ vs. 50% non-LGBTQ+ adults.
- Staying at an Airbnb: 43% LGBTQ+ vs. 35% non-LGBTQ+ adults.

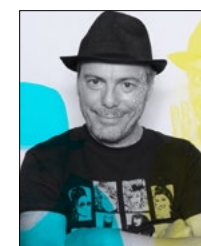
- Flying commercial aircraft: 43% LGBTQ+ vs. 35% non-LGBTQ+ adults.
- Travelling to Europe: 5% LGBTQ+ vs. 28% non-LGBTQ+ adults.
- Attending a crowded event, concert, theme park or beach: 33% LGBTQ+ vs. 25% non-LGBTQ+.
- Taking a cruise: 31% LGBTQ+ vs. 23% non-LGBTQ+.

Finally, when asked what conditions or arguments will have the greatest impact on their personal decisions toward leisure travel in 2020, LGBTQ+ travellers disproportionately favoured:

- Significantly reduced public health risks: 60% LGBTQ+ vs. 54% non-LGBTQ+.
- Strong need for travel/change of scenery: 54% LGBTQ+ vs. 43% non-LGBTQ+.
- Compelling travel bargains and promotions: 47% LGBTQ+ vs. 36% non-LGBTQ+.
- Personal desire to support a destination and local economy: 48% LGBTQ+ vs. 33% non-LGBTQ+.

Of course all these responses are dependent on actually being able to travel, first within one's own country, and then abroad. We are seeing many countries beginning to ease restrictions and providing dates toward reopening their borders to tourists. When they do, and the opportunity arises, the LGBTQ+ community will be there to support those destinations and companies who have supported them in the past.

Bryen Dunn is a freelance journalist based in Toronto with a focus on tourism, lifestyle, entertainment and community issues.



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Waiting for the Dawn

By Mychol Scully

Almost since this pandemic started to impact our daily lives, there's been talk of "the new normal," about how the future will be very different from the past we've been living. There are a variety of narratives and speculation about what the new normal might look like; how it might be lived.

Some are suggesting that how we're living now, in the middle of the crisis, is the template for what comes after... that there is no "after" but only a new normal of isolation, separation and threat. I'm pretty sure that's not how it will be.

Some are suggesting that after the current period of crisis response, life will return to pre-pandemic norms. The economy will return to it's previous condition, shops will reopen, work will be what it was before, relationships will go back to the way they worked before,

and it will be as if this whole pandemic experience was a bad dream from which we have awakened. I'm also relatively certain that won't happen either.

Some are suggesting that life after COVID-19 will be a harsher, more state-controlled situation, where authoritarian impulses will gain the upper hand. Personal freedoms and civil liberties will be sacrificed on the altar of perceived security to offer people what will, in fact, be an illusion. Think of the Patriot Act in the USA immediately following the 9-11 attacks on the World Trade Centre, where state surveillance with and without public knowledge compromised fundamental principles of equality, liberty and freedom. The pessimist in me feels this is a real possibility, although I also feel that many people will be sensitive to the seduction this illusion offers, having been tricked by it before, and will very vocally reject it.

Still another scenario, fervently wished for by a growing number of individuals, is that our experiences during this time of lockdown, shutdown and discomfort has sufficiently

highlighted the multiple shortcomings of our previous societal models that fundamental structural changes will be demanded. Everything from supply chain economics to growth capitalism to economic and social inequity will be called into question. The potential to rebuild society with a new, quasi-utopian vision will rise up and life will be better in meaningful ways for all participants. The idealist in me swoons at the thought.

But the realist in me knows that none of these scenarios will come to pass. Humans and the societies they create are nothing if not unpredictable. The human response, by virtue of our evolutionary survival over tens of thousands of years, has made us primarily reactionary by nature. We will react, individually and in groups, to the challenges we've come through during this time. Our reactions will be varied and shaped by our personal interpretation of our experiences.

We WILL roll up our sleeves and get on with the day. Many will take stock of how our governmental and institutional authorities handled themselves and the situation during the crisis, and will hold those authorities accountable, in the streets and at the ballot box.

Others, worn out from the challenge, will retreat into whatever structures and patterns offer comfort and succour after the exhausting and somewhat frightening time we are living through now. They will require gentle support and encouragement to restore their spirits so they can step up to the plate of life and living.

My best hope and wish for the post-pandemic "new normal" is an objective yet sensitive taking stock of the choices we must make to amplify the human spirit and forge new, healthier, more compassionate ways of conducting human affairs.

It took many generations working diligently to build a world pursuing a particular vision of the future (that may have taken a wrong turn

or two along the way) to bring us to where we were before the pandemic hit. Modifying that world using what we've discovered during the COVID-19 crisis will not be simple or easy. The important thing to note is that we CAN course correct our trajectory, leveraging what we've learned previously about technology, how economies work (and don't work) and identifying the parts of the pre-pandemic world that we'd like to change for the better.

The first step in the right direction will be for each of us to assess our own thoughts and feelings about how life worked before the crisis and how we would like things to be after the crisis is over. Humans' ability to visualize the future is one of the most important aspects of what we are that separates us from the rest of the living beings on this planet. We must exercise that ability to visualize; to create a mental map of the future before we venture forward into the unknown post-COVID new world.

Writing this at the beginning of June 2020, I realize it will be many months before the current conditions of separation, isolation and threat are over. NOW is the perfect time to begin visualizing the future we want, laying the groundwork for how we will manifest that vision in our own individual lives before we begin the challenging (and exhilarating) task of manifesting that positive change in the world around us.

Stay safe. Stay healthy. Be gentle with yourself and those around you. Join me as we celebrate the new normal, waiting for the dawn.

Mychol Scully has been Art Director and Webmaster for INspired Media publications since 2015. He is also a regular contributor to the quarterly publication PinkPlayMags. You can read his writing at mychol.com.




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Finding Tranquility in the COVID-19 Pandemic Is Perfection

Witnessing Human Nature and the Nature of Things

By Darren Stehle

Since most of Canada went into “lockdown” since mid-March, we have been witnessing the greatest disruption to society in the 21st-century. Everything has been called into question: economic stability; capitalism; populism; human rights; basic human freedoms; climate change, and; our very mortality.

How can we remain calm and human-hearted in a time of such unprecedented disruption? How can we see the beauty and creative potential in the unfolding of this unique experience in human history?

For me, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed how some things change while others become more apparent, to the point you cannot look away. I was a participant in two incidents this April that had a profound impact on my emotional and moral understanding of human behaviour.

On April 16, my partner and I went to Loblaws at Church and Carlton. We went early to

minimize human contact. Waiting in the self-checkout line I heard someone make a distressing, animal-like sound; something you couldn't ignore. I saw a man holding on to the checkout station, shaking and having an epileptic seizure. As he was collapsing to the floor I shouted, “Someone call 911!” When I looked around, many were ignoring the situation, while others were frozen in response to fear.

I dropped my grocery basket, moved in front of people ahead of me, and rounded the corner to help the man on the ground, just behind someone else who sprung into action moments before I did. He initiated first-aid, trying to get a response from the man shaking, foaming at the mouth, and in extreme distress. I offered my help. He asked me to grab his knapsack in which he had latex gloves. My partner came over and called 911.

Firemen arrived as first responders and I was able to leave the fray. There were too many of us too close together. With my back up against a wall I watched in shock holding back tears at what I'd witnessed.

Later that day, I was at my favourite health food store on Parliament. The woman behind the counter was on the phone with someone

she knew. She told them that she would have to call back because she had a customer. She hung up, put her hands to her face and started crying. I asked her what was wrong and she told me her friend's grandmother had just died from COVID-19. I asked her how I could help, could I get the manager at the back of the store to take over so she could have some time to herself. When I got home I was unable to do much of anything, emotionally spent and morally fatigued.

The following Friday I went to No Frills on Parliament where I am a regular shopper. Bagging my groceries, I heard and then saw a commotion. One of the staff was trying to block someone from getting through two checkout stations. He was aggressive, trying to push her out of his way. When he broke free I stepped across and put out my foot, tripping him. He went sprawling, face down on the ground, but quickly got up and ran towards the exit. Another store clerk, who is at least eight inches shorter than the thief, was trying to block him from escaping the store with a knapsack full of stolen goods. I ran after him, grabbing one leg and a belt buckle. When he dropped his bag and the store clerk let go, I did the same, and he fled.

After that incident I questioned my actions wondering if I'd done the right thing. Two employees told me the thief had pushed staff and while they deal with theft all the time they can't tolerate physical threats. I realized I was helping protect front-line workers who are more stressed than ever, dealing with anxious and sometimes arrogant customers, and trying to protect their health. As a regular it was my responsibility to help them out of human-heartedness.

Going Along with the Natural Process of Life

When we witness the world with a human-hearted response we embrace this pandemic as our present moment. In this time of

uncertainty, isolation, grief, stress, and existential threat, what is the higher good? Not in the sense of ethics, rather, how do we act in an intuitive way? As we bear witness to this virus and its affect, how can we see things differently by embracing natural phenomena for the simplicity of what it is?

The pandemic was borne of this earth and simply is. Our perception of the virus is an artificial, intellectual construct. The virus bears no prejudice, malice, or judgement. It flows into existence like water from a river into a lake. Humans react, trying to control that which they can't, metaphorically trying to dam the river while standing in the middle of it.

Hopefully we will find a vaccine knowing full well we cannot stop the rise of another virus or pandemic. This perception is the first step toward acceptance — the way towards the tranquillity of witnessing disruption as the perfect and natural flow of life.

I invite you to practice a human-hearted response during this pandemic: equanimity over judgement; compassion for front-line workers; conscientious attention to physical distancing, and; the assumption you are asymptomatic. Leading in this way doesn't make you immune to the virus, however you can choose who you want to be in the oneness of a more caring humanity.

(Adapted and modified from, “Seizures, Tears, and Chasing Thieves: Getting Certainty In Overwhelming Times” on [ThinkQueerlyPodcast.com](https://www.thinkqueerlypodcast.com/)).

Darren Stehle is a personal leadership coach in Toronto, Canada who helps people fully embrace their uniqueness and creative potential to freely create the life they want. Darren writes and podcasts regularly about Queer Leadership and Humanity at [DarrenStehle.com](https://www.DarrenStehle.com).





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0.5 oz Triple Sec
2 Dashes Grapefruit bitters
Handful Watermelon chunks

- 1 Add a watermelon to shaker and muddle a few times.
- 2 Add all ingredients except for Strawberry Smashed Soda into the shaker with ice. Shake for 10-15 seconds.
- 3 Strain over ice, and top with smashed soda.
- 4 Garnish with a slice of watermelon and enjoy!

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Resilience in the Time of COVID-19

By Steven Ross LCSW RSW NASM

One morning in mid-March, I woke up in my bedroom in NYC, and thought, well, this is not looking very good. I had just flown into the city about five days prior from Toronto for a weekend of work and theatre. I have been traveling back and forth from NYC to Toronto on a weekly basis since the beginning of the year, striving to build a private psychotherapy practice in Toronto while also maintaining my office in Manhattan.

It had been going pretty well so far, getting new patients and filling my schedule out in both, but that particular trip to NYC was turning out to be quite a different adventure, and it was also destined to be the beginning of a whole new one, far removed from the one I had been expecting. Adaptability and resilience are the words that sat on the tip of my tongue that day, and pretty much every day since.

What is resilience all about? It means learning how to cope in spite of all the setbacks and barriers that get in the way. It is a measure of how much you want something and are willing and able to overcome the obstacles set out. COVID-19 has set forth more obstacles, setbacks, and barriers than we could ever have imagined in our lifetime. It is an unsettling time for all of us, for a myriad of different reasons. We are all, basically, in the same storm, swirling around and wondering when it will end, but we are certainly not in the same boat. Your boat may be more structurally

sound, or more crowded. You might be finding loneliness or financial ruin in your boat, or you might feel that it is quickly sinking. Or maybe, it is something else entirely. It is all perspective, and it's all very personal.

Our individual reaction to this unprecedented time is as personal as it can get. Some of us are forging out into the stormy waters feeling very much on our own or surrounded by a few friends. Some are separated from their loved ones, and some are trapped inside with others that bring tension to our already complicated lives. Some of us have loved ones who are first responders, and some have to deal with elderly parents or grandparents who are more susceptible to this deadly virus. Your scenario is unlike anyone else's. And must be looked at through that very private lens and with a whole lot of compassion.

Fear is living underneath everyone's covers, peeking out and grabbing hold when we least expect it. We all have an evolutionary bias towards expecting the worst, noticing and responding to the negative in order to survive. It is there to keep us alive, for the most part, but there are so many avenues of thought that could take us down some pretty terribly dark rabbit holes out there. With help, we can find the path forward that isn't as tight a fit or as poorly lit. Modifying and training ourselves to gain some control in the appraisal of threat is key to enhancing our sense of self-efficacy and improving our adaptive coping mechanisms to face the challenges ahead. This is all within our reach if we can stop and take a look at where we are and understand our personal triggers of anxiety.

The main idea is finding our window of tolerance, and in that space, we discover our resilience. If our anxiety is too high, or even if it is too low, we will not be able to find the ability to respond adaptively to what is swirling around us. Finding space to breathe, release tension and stress through exercise, practice mindfulness and meditation, engage in self-compassion, and discover compassion



how resilient we actually are and also helps us to learn and develop the areas of our persona that struggle to stay stable and secure. Not dwelling in the anxiety of what lies ahead but finding the constructive compassion within to deal with our today, tomorrow, and the week ahead is what will make a world of difference. Trying not to beam ourselves into the unknown uncertainty of the future will help validate our concerns, normalize our horizons, and give room to experience a type of positivity that will help us stay safe and sane. It comes down to competency, connection, and the concept of creativity.

They say knowledge is power and competency is one of the qualities of resilience that will make us feel safer and more prepared for what lies ahead. We must find productive actions that give a sense of control and accomplishment. Learning and engaging in the challenges ahead will produce a sense of calm, as long as we try to operate in that window of tolerance. We must find ways to engage and connect with our friends and family, as well as with our inner passions. Connection is one of the main avenues forward through these complicated times, as is creativity. That component will be key as we explore what makes us happy and what makes us feel a part of something bigger than just ourselves. If we can try to practice slow and steady breathing exercises, relax into some meditation practices, or find that exercise program that makes you feel more alive and engaged, we will grow in ways that will help us beyond just the present. These all are ways to creatively reflect and form a deeper connection to our mind, body, and soul, and discover our own brand of competency and resilience.

And this is just the beginning. To navigate all that is going on within ourselves, we need to be kind and patient with ourselves in almost every conceivable way. We must find a way to give ourselves the room and space to feel all those pesky emotions that will be stirred up,

within ourselves towards others will all help to establish our safe place, both physically and mentally, and find internal peace.

This period of time can not be seen as anything but trauma. Depending on your situation, it might not be capital-T trauma, but this is most assuredly trauma nonetheless, and it is most assuredly linked to our resilience. This kind of experience is what teaches us just



and hopefully, find someone to talk them out with. There is no way we can just “hold it together” all day, every day going forward. Many of the people I talk to every week are finding that even within the monotony of isolation, their responses fluctuate, sometimes for no obvious or apparent reason. It makes sense, as these are unprecedented times, with never-before-experienced problems that have no predictable end dates. It is unclear when

we will return to something normal, or a place that resembles something we knew only a few months ago. The “New Normal” is impossible to understand or see presently, but it is also something that we don’t necessarily have to look at with dread and discomfort. Good things can come out of this. We might find strengths that we never knew we had or aspects of ourselves that grew more focused or functional during this timeframe. It is all in the way we look into ourselves and how we try to respond to our today, tomorrow, and the week ahead.

One can hope that this pandemic will change people’s priorities, from wanting things to needing people. To care for our environment and one another, rather than worrying only about what they have or what they can buy. I am not completely convinced as I watch the news. People protesting the shutdown makes me feel sad and scared about our future. But I cannot go too deep down that hole. I will cross my fingers and hold on to hope. Today, tomorrow, and this week, that is what matters, and that conceptual way of thinking is what will get me to the finishing line. That and the world I create, through creativity, competency, and most of all connection.

Steven Ross LCSW NASM is a Registered Licensed Clinical Social Worker with a private psychotherapy practice in both Toronto, Canada and New York City, NY. For information on online or in-person therapy, feel free to send an email to stvnross@me.com.

Steven also writes about theatre all over the world for Frontmezzjunkies.com and Times Square Chronicles.



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